



State of Connecticut

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Senate Minority Leader Len Fasano
Testimony re: Increasing Access to Overdose Reversal Drugs;
Funds Appropriated to the Department of Developmental Services
Public Health Committee Public Hearing
February 16, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding H.B. No. 5053 AN ACT INCREASING ACCESS TO OVERDOSE REVERSAL DRUGS and H.B. No. 5128 An Act Concerning Funds Appropriated to the Department of Developmental Services.

I applaud Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the majority leaders for introducing AN ACT INCREASING ACCESS TO OVERDOSE REVERSAL DRUGS which aims to ensure all local emergency medical providers are equipped with and trained to use Narcan to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. This bill also would prohibit insurers from requiring prior authorization before dispensing an opioid antagonist, which is a method used to control costs but could impede access to Narcan.

Clearly our state needs to take action to combat the devastating rise in heroin abuse and opioid overdoses. This is an issue that touches all people from all walks of life across our state. In fact, in June of 2015 in my hometown of North Haven, we had 3 suspected heroin overdoses in a 36 hour. And in a 3 year period, the Town of Wallingford experienced 53 deaths, all due to some type of substance overdose. 80% of the deaths were people under 25 years old. The disturbing reality is that overdoses occur far too frequently and must be dealt with immediately to save lives.

Proposals such as the one before us today certainly move our state in the right direction to treating the effects of overdoses and saving lives. In addition to making lifesaving drugs more available to first responders, we also have to work together to develop policies that aim to prevent opioid abuse and address the causes of this epidemic. We need to identify ways to treat the problems before they become deadly.

No one group has all the answers, but collectively we can address this public health crisis together. Therefore, I also want to testify today in support of any effort to organize a proactive working group of stakeholders to develop a statewide strategy to combat opioid abuse, as has been proposed by the Republican caucuses.

I believe the best way to expand on the governor's efforts is to form a bipartisan working group immediately including all four caucuses, the governor's office, local public health officials, substance abuse treatment providers, the Department of Public Health, the Insurance Department, police chiefs

and municipal leaders. Everyone should have a voice. This working group should be tasked with assessing the needs of our communities to prevent and treat opioid abuse specifically. The group should also be tasked with formulating a bipartisan legislative proposal to implement a focused strategy to tackle opiate use this legislative session.

The state's current Alcohol and Drug Policy Council has not taken an active role in addressing the specific problems associated with opioid abuse. They only meet four times a year. We need to do more and we need a group dedicated to analyzing the unique circumstances and trends surrounding opioid abuse specifically.

I firmly believe that in order to create the most effective policies, this cannot be a conversation among only lawmakers, just like it cannot be a conversation among only public health officials, or a conversation among only law enforcement. It must be a conversation among all stakeholders. Together we need an open dialogue.

I thank the governor and legislature for raising this bill, and I encourage more conversation, more dialogue and more collaboration in establishing a statewide strategy to deal with this deadly and growing crisis.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Len Fasano
Senate Minority Leader